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ZNY CCCCC ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY BAKU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1180
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 3378
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 0901
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RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000392

SIPDIS

FOR EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/13/2019

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SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN: ERDOGAN SAYS NK RESOLUTION FIRST,
BORDERS OPENED AFTERWARD

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Don Lu
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: President Aliyev called Turkish PM Erdogan's May 13-14 visit to Baku "very productive," applauding the PM's strong public messages on Turkey-Armenia reconciliation and resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Erdogan, addressing Azerbaijan's Parliament and in a joint press conference with President Aliyev, said that "Turkey will not sign the final agreement with Armenia unless Azerbaijan and Armenia reach consensus on Nagorno-Karabakh." President Aliyev, in turn, called the Turkish PM's words "wonderfully clear." Baku is clearly spinning the Erdogan's visit to maximum effect in an effort to de-rail the Turkey-Armenia reconciliation process. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan completed a two-day visit to Baku May 14, addressing publicly and privately Azerbaijani concerns about the Turkey-Armenia "roadmap" on reconciliation, initialed April 22. The Erdogan visit brought to a head a flurry of diplomatic activity related to movement towards Turkey-Armenia rapprochement, which rallied Azerbaijani Government, opposition leaders and civil society in protest, sometimes with a strong anti-Ankara bent. Azerbaijan's leaders and other commentators said publicly today, as reported on all newspapers and on television and radio, that Erdogan's visit, in light of Azerbaijan's interests in Nagorno-Karabakh and elsewhere, was highly successful, with the Turkish PM saying precisely the right things on NK implications and the opening of borders with Armenia.

¶3. (SBU) At a May 13 press conference, PM Erdogan, referring to ongoing talks with Armenia, said "it is impossible for us to open the border unless the occupation ends." Further clarifying his position, the PM said, "Turkey will not sign the final agreement with Armenia unless Azerbaijan and Armenia reach consensus on Nagorno-Karabakh." President Aliyev, in turn, called the day's discussion "very productive," and noted that the "Prime Minister of Turkey had just given a wonderfully clear answer." The Azerbaijani people, he said, now have no grounds "for any doubt, any other thought or speculation." In a following interview with Azerbaijan's ANS TV, Erdogan claimed to be repeating a consistent message, suggesting that he had struck similar themes in Turkey, addressing the parliament and television

audiences, and at a press conference in London following the G20 Summit.

14. (SBU) At Azerbaijan's Parliament, PM Erdogan delivered a similar message to an audience that was, at least in the beginning, quite skeptical of his appearance. "We have not taken any step which would hurt Azerbaijan's national interests and we will not," the Prime Minister said. "Peace and stability cannot be restored in the South Caucasus unless progress is made with regard to Nagorno-Karabakh." Erdogan further told parliamentarians that the NK problem must be resolved "on the basis of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity," and suggested that this would take place "as we make progress in the normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia." Erdogan noted that during President Obama's visit to Turkey, he and other Turkish leaders had raised the NK conflict in the context of Turkey-Armenia reconciliation with the American side. According to press reports, Erdogan received "enthusiastic applause" from the MPs.

15. (SBU) Public reaction to the Prime Minister's visit has been highly positive. Parliamentarians, speaking to the press, have expressed satisfaction with Erdogan's words. Even opposition leaders, like Musavat Party chief Isa Qambar, praised the Turkish PM, calling him "reliable."

16. (C) Comment: Azerbaijan is trying to cast this visit as one of a friend coming to apologize for having made a mistake. The suggestion that the resolution of the NK dispute must precede the signing the reconciliation roadmap

BAKU 00000392 002 OF 002

is clearly designed to thwart the reconciliation process. The Turkish PM was viewed here with suspicion in days leading up to the visit, with some Azerbaijani insiders alleging that interlocutors had been instructed to give Erdogan "a cool reception." With the joint press conference) something that is still rather unusual in Baku) and following the speech to Parliament, Baku is promoting the message that Azerbaijan got everything it wanted out of the Turkism Prime Minister and all is forgiven. That full frontal assault is also likely aimed at Armenia. Baku no doubt wants to put forward a strong message of Azerbaijan-Turkey solidarity to Yerevan, paving the way for Armenia to drive the "roadmap" completely into the ditch. The Embassy will continue to engage the government at the highest levels to encourage them to appreciate that the reversal of the Turkey-Armenia reconciliation process will kill any prospect for near-term progress on Nagorno-Karabakh.

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